DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 157 TM 850 641

TITLE	Handbook for Establishing Minimum Competency Programs in Wyoming Schools.
INSTITUTION	Wyoming State Dept. of Education, Cheyenne.
PUB DATE	82
NOTE	16p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Competency Based Education; Educational Planning; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Guidelines; *Minimum Competencies; *Program Implementation; Remedial Programs; *School Districts; State Boards of Education; *Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	Elementary Secondary Education Act Title II; *Wyoming

ABSTRACT

This handbook is designed to help local school districts to implement the November 8, 1980, State Board of Education policy requiring school districts to identify individual student needs in reading, writing, computation, and civic and economic responsibility and to provide assistance to those students. The Wyoming approach to minimum competency is unique among the 36 states having minimum competency requirements in that it focuses on the meeting of individual student needs at the local level and does not require automatic denial of a diploma as a result of failing a test. This approach places the responsibility for setting standards, assessing students, and determining the point at which they may be graduated at the local district level. This handbook is a response to district requests to provide guidance, and its contents should be read as suggestions not as mandates. In the accreditation process, the state will look for evidence that the district is moving toward implementation of the policy. The details of the program are to be developed locally. Districts may find this handbook helpful in developing an approach which best fits their own setting. (PN)

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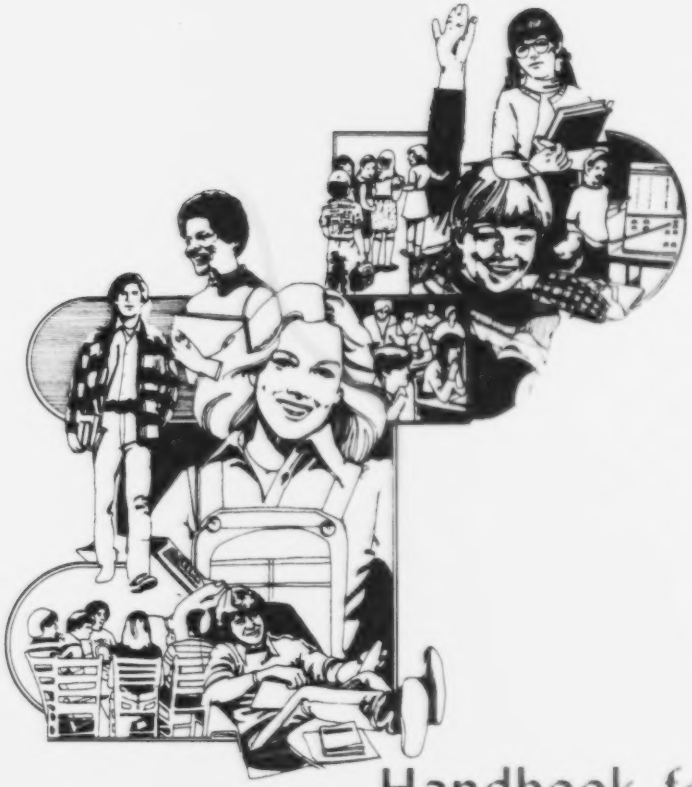

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TM 850 641

Handbook for Establishing Minimum Competency Programs in Wyoming Schools

1982

Published by

WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Hathaway Building, Cheyenne, WY 82002

Lynn Simons
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

This handbook was developed by the State Title II (ESEA) Basic Skills Advisory Council in a meeting specifically designed for such development.

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This handbook was developed and printed using funds provided by Title II (ESEA).

Foreword

The Wyoming State Department of Education is pleased to publish this Handbook for Establishing Minimum Competency Programs in Wyoming schools. The handbook is designed to assist local school districts to implement the November 8, 1980 State Board of Education policy requiring school districts to identify individual student needs in reading, writing, computation, civic and economic responsibility and provide assistance to those students.

The Wyoming approach to minimum competency is unique among the 36 states having minimum competency requirements in that it is focused on the meeting of individual student needs at the local level and does not *require* automatic denial of a diploma as a result of failing a test. This is in contrast to states which mandate that specific proficiencies be demonstrated prior to graduation by all students through a state or local testing program. The Wyoming approach is consistent with two Wyoming traditions--local control and serving the needs of all students. The Wyoming approach places the responsibility for setting standards, assessing students, and determining the point at which they may be graduated at the local district level.

This handbook is a response to district requests to provide guidance for accomplishing these tasks. *Its contents should be read as suggestions not as mandates.* In the accreditation process, the state will look for evidence that the district is moving toward implementation of the policy. The details of the program are to be developed locally. Districts may find the handbook helpful in developing an approach which best fits their own setting.

The staff at the State Department of Education stands ready to help districts implement the policy.

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Minimum competencies for high school graduation

All schools in Wyoming will provide within their programs a process for identifying students who need assistance in the basic skills required for effective adult citizenship and will provide assistance to those students in order to assure them every opportunity to demonstrate those proficiencies. Minimum state requirements for the issuing of a public high school diploma include:

- *Successful completion of a program including credits or units identified in the Wyoming School Accreditation Standards equal to a regular student course load extending through the senior year of high school.*

- *Sufficient attendance in courses and programs to gain fully the educational and social benefits of the secondary program.*

- *Demonstrated ability to read, write, and compute with proficiency, and an understanding of the process and structure of democratic governance and the free enterprise system; or completion of remedial programs designed to meet individual needs in these areas.*

Required standards for graduation are the responsibility of the local school district working in conjunction with the State Department of Education. Local school districts are required to establish their own standards of proficiency and program requirements for graduation, and are encouraged to go beyond those minimum standards established by the State Board of Education.

Policy adopted November 8, 1980

Background

In November, 1977, the State Board of Education adopted a policy requiring Wyoming school districts to implement standards for high school graduation based on student proficiencies in reading, writing, computation, and understanding of democratic governance and the free enterprise system. From November, 1977, to September, 1979, the State Department of Education attempted to develop further definitions, statements of proficiency levels, and procedures for implementation. After learning that similar programs in other states were encountering difficulties and some, notably Florida, were being challenged in the courts, the state chose to take no further action on standards, required proficiency levels, or implementation dates. In September of 1979, however, the Board reaffirmed the 1977 policy and appointed a task force to recommend, by May 1980, an implementation plan.

This task force met four times to pursue the subject and develop its recommendations. At the first meeting, Dr. Chris Pipho of the Education Commission of the States met with the group, reviewed the status of the movement in the 37 other states involved in setting such standards and defined the numerous issues to be addressed. The second meeting was devoted to hearing reports from Wyoming school districts that were exploring and experimenting with competency/proficiency programs. The third meeting

was devoted to formulating positions in response to a wide variety of issues. The fourth meeting was devoted to the drafting of a report.

The May, 1980 task force report to the State Board placed emphasis on the fact that many school districts were developing programs leading to proficiency requirements for graduation and highlighted the importance of local involvement in the process. It defined competency as: "The quality or state of being functionally adequate or having sufficient knowledge, judgement, skill or strength." It defined proficiency as: "The level of acceptable achievement." The report stressed to the Board, that the task force felt a high school diploma should represent "a broad base of proficiency and not hinge on the results of a single test or standard." Rather, students should "be graduated on the basis of many criteria--including achievement of basic proficiencies." The report further emphasized the need for "comprehensive remediation programs for those students who need them," and pointed out that proficiency should be the goal of all education, "...not just a problem for high schools to solve."

The Wyoming State Board of Education received the task force report and, after discussion of the report, adopted a new policy November 8, 1980 (see page 1). The Board also adopted as guidelines task force recommendations calling for the proficiency levels and remedial programs to be developed in each local district; for districts to ensure that the programs be "continuous, ongoing, and diagnostic in nature throughout a child's education;" and that school districts submit to the State Department of Education, as part of the 1982 Annual Accreditation Report, "a description of the district's proficiency program, including implementation dates. Thereafter, a progress report is to be submitted annually."

Q? By what date must local district minimum competency programs be in place?

A. The State Board left this to local districts to determine. The only requirement is that districts report progress, including implementation dates, in their October 1982 state accreditation reports.

Q? The state policy mentions completion of remedial instruction prior to graduation. May a local district require actual demonstration of specific competencies as a graduation requirement?

A. Yes. The State Board has not defined "completion." Further, the Board has established only a minimum requirement. School districts may establish higher or stiffer standards just as they may now do with course requirements for graduation.

Q? How does the policy affect handicapped students?

A. Handicapped students who have been identified and placed in an IEP process would appear to be properly placed in compliance with the policy so long as their needs in meeting the district's prescribed competencies are considered in developing the IEP.

Questions and Answers on the Wyoming program

Q? Doesn't the new policy demand an IEP for <u>every</u> student?

A. No. Ideally, the IEP approach, or something similar, would seem a logical response to dealing with the results of the required diagnosis of student needs. It is not, however, a required response. Placement in remedial classes, special instruction, individualized programs, etc. are all appropriate responses to meeting student needs.

Q? At what grade level must the diagnosis take place?

A. The State Board has not set a specific grade level. It seems obvious that the diagnosis must take place early enough to allow adequate time to schedule remediation. Most districts are now looking at the entire K-12 program and testing sequence in hopes that problems with stated competencies can be identified early. Research and logic tells us that the later problems are identified the more difficult they are to remediate.

Q? Has the state published or circulated suggested lists of competencies and does it intend to do so?

A. No official lists exist. Several suggested lists are, however, available. The department intends to continue collecting sample competencies from other states and will make such available to school districts requesting them. The department is also using Title II funds to establish a statewide bank of competency statements and test items. For further information call the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, State Department of Education.

Q? If the state is going to require competencies why doesn't the state establish the required competencies?

A. Wyoming is a state with a tradition of local control. The 13 member task force, established by the State Board, was determined to leave as many decisions as possible to local districts. The State Board agreed with this position.

Q? How does a local district obtain help from the State Department of Education in establishing its program?

A. The department has consultants in each of the areas in which competencies are required. Their services are available and can be obtained by calling the State Department of Education or requesting such services from the district broker.

Q? How "serious" is the State Board of Education about this policy?

A. Serious, indeed. The Board intends that this policy lead to revitalization of a commitment to basic skills instruction. The Board believes in local schools and is confident that, with the help of the State Department of Education staff, this revitalization will occur.

Q? Will the State Board formally approve each district's progress reports?

A. No. The progress report is only a small part of the accreditation report. Failure to report could threaten accreditation. Should a judgment be made that a district report is inadequate or that a district is not making progress every effort would be made by the Board, through the State Department of Education staff, to provide the district with assistance to solve the problem.

Suggested procedures

Getting started

I. Establish a district-wide task force incorporating, at a minimum, representatives of building administration, K-12 teachers, and central office curriculum personnel.

II. The task force's responsibility is to recommend:

A. Which areas of the curriculum will be included in the proficiency program;

B. The levels at which students will be assessed;

C. How remediation will take place;

D. The type of proficiency program; e.g., a diagnostic-prescriptive program with diploma based on results of student progress, a diagnostic-prescriptive program with diploma denied until competencies are demonstrated, etc.;

E. A time line for program development and implementation;

F. Possible program development procedures, such as:

1. A program development and review committee of subject area teachers and administrators;

2. The level of community involvement, and

3. Program characteristics.

G. The type of proficiency to be measured; e.g., school skills(the stuent will be able to add), life skills (the student will be able to balance a checkbook), or a combination of both types of skills.

III. In formulating its recommendations the committee has available:

A. Copies of the State Board policy,

B. A resource library of materials,

C. Access to competent and experienced consultant help, and

D. Adequate released time for committee meetings.

IV. The task force report should be presented for final approval to the administration and school board through regular local policy-making channels.

V. The task force should serve as the coordinating committee to maintain cohesiveness and focus in the program's development, implementation, and evaluation.

Developing the program

I. The time line should provide realistic time periods for district personnel to accomplish the goals. For example, a district may want to pursue one area per year rather than several areas at once.

II. Appropriate committee structures should be specified to help the district develop proficiency statements in the target areas.

A. Committees should be representative of K-12 faculty and administration.

B. Committees should have a mechanism for obtaining public input.

C. Committees should have access to competent consultant help.

D. Committees should have adequate released time to accomplish assigned tasks.

III. Final program approval for each area should be gained through regular school channels.

Developing proficiency statements

I. The actual number of proficiencies to be demonstrated by students should be small enough to maintain program manageability. Care should be taken that items are truly proficiencies and not enabling skills leading to competency.

Example

Proficiency

The student can read a newspaper editorial and select from several statements the one which best captures its theme.

Enabling Skills

The student will be able to:

locate the main sentence in a paragraph.

Proficiency

The student can balance a checkbook, involving ten withdrawals, interspersed by three deposits.

Enabling Skills

The student will be able to:

add and subtract whole numbers.

II. A decision must be made as to whether the district will assess proficiency in terms of life skills or school skills. In the example above the proficiency might be classified as a life skill--the enabler as a school skill.

III. Proficiency statements should be written as specifically as possible to make clear what behavior the competent student will display.

Example

The student will be able to examine a hypothetical personal budget and calculate the percentage that is devoted to a specific purpose (as opposed to, the student will be able to do percentage problems).

IV. Each proficiency statement should be supported by possible performance indicators.

Example

Proficiency

The student will demonstrate knowledge of the voting machine.

Performance Indicators

- state voting age requirements
- cite voter registration requirements
- describe how to register
- cite two sources of information on issues and/or candidates
- properly mark a sample ballot
- operate a voting machine

Note: The development of performance indicators will facilitate the assessment program.

V. Care must be taken to recognize the "minimal" nature of the program so as to avoid setting proficiency standards too high. Each proficiency statement should be evaluated in terms of whether or not it can be defended as something that is:

   A. To be expected of all high school graduates in your community;

   B. A survival skill; and

   C. Realistic in terms of implementing remediation.

Establishing the assessment program

I. Student assessment should be undertaken early enough in the student's career to assure adequate time for remediation. Hopefully, informal assessment will begin as early as grade 1 and formal assessment no later than grade 8.

II. Assessment should include more than a single test or assessment technique but should include such information as:

   A. Teacher observation data,

   B. Student classroom grades,

   C. Student achievement test scores, and

   D. Other information available in the local setting.

Designing remedial programs

I. Remedial instruction is focused on the specific identified needs of each student.

II. The remedial program is designed for flexibility. Ideally, instruction should be provided in a specific skill with open entry/open exit as opposed to repeating entire courses or enrolling in a full semester of remediation unless such is specifically indicated.

III. Specific remedial instruction materials and techniques are available for each proficiency measured.

IV. A record-keeping system is used to assure all students requiring remediation are served and those completing remediation are credited with such completion.

V. The program provides for identified handicapped students by incorporating opportunities to meet district adopted proficiency standards in each Individual Education Program(I.E.P)

Explaining the program

I. Adequate public participation and publicity is provided so the public understands the program.

II. Adequate explanation of the program is provided students so they understand:

A. The role of the program as it affects graduation; and

B. The "minimum" nature of the requirement and its relation to total educational and graduation requirements.

III. All school personnel, K-12, are aware of the program and the proficiencies to be assessed.

Reviewing the program

I. A curriculum review mechanism is established to assure appropriate curriculum is available to provide every student an opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills to be assessed.

II. A program review process is established to assure that the proficiency program does not lead to:

A. Curriculum narrowing - (i.e., dropping elective "non-basic" courses designed for more advanced students in favor of remedial courses);

B. Course narrowing-(i.e., placing so much emphasis on those proficiencies for which a specfic course might be held responsible that other important information and/or enrichment opportunities are forgotten); and

C. Narrowing of the role of the school - (i.e., it is generally recognized the role of the school in society goes beyond minimums and includes college preparatory programs, vocational education programs, programs to expand cultural awareness, continuing education opportunities etc., because society expects schools to provide opportunities for all students to reach their potential).